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SIPDIS

NEA/ARP FOR JOSH HARRIS AND JEREMY BERDNT

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: FAIR PTER SCUL KPAD SA  
SUBJECT: SAUDIS ANGRY & CONFUSED OVER NEW TSA SCREENING  
PROCEDURES

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¶1. AN AVALANCHE OF INQUIRIES: The Embassy has been deluged with media inquiries since the story broke January 4. All Saudi media outlets reported January 5 that the U.S. Department of State had issued a new directive for intensive air screening of U.S.-bound passengers from 14 countries, including Saudi Arabia. Saudi official and public reaction to the proposed TSA screening procedures has been swift, vehement, and uniformly negative, from the top levels of government on down. We have been vilified in the media, in meetings and in casual conversation, accused of implementing reactionary procedures that are not necessitated by recent events. The following are just a few examples of the responses we have received.

¶2. ROYAL DENUNCIATION: Assistant Minister of Defense Prince Khalid bin Sultan angrily denounced the new procedures during a January 5 meeting with Ambassador Smith, saying that singling Saudis out for special searches would deter Saudis from travelling to the U.S., including Saudis travelling to attend military training.

¶3. SECURITY OFFICIALS INCREDULOUS: The Saudi Director General of Civil Aviation similarly denounced the new procedures in a call to TSA's Amman-based regional representative, and has demanded a meeting with the Ambassador on Saturday to discuss the measures. Separately, during a routine meeting with D/RSO, the commander of the diplomatic police (responsible for all residential areas currently used by direct-hire American Embassy personnel), supplanted pleasantries with scathing and indignant questions regarding the new procedures, and demanding details and explanations as to why the Kingdom as a whole was being singled out.

¶4. POLITICAL BLACKMAIL: Al-Watan, a leading daily, reported resentment and surprise over the U.S. decision to inspect Saudi citizens. An academic researcher, Sultan Angaris, was quoted as saying: "This process is political blackmailing resulting from the position of the Kingdom against Israel, and it is an insult to each Saudi citizen who will now be treated as a terrorist." He added: "There is nothing new since the 9/11 attacks. Personal inspections, difficulties in obtaining visas, even after interviews that have included the elderly and disabled in wheelchairs- the list goes on." The paper added that some students studying in the U.S. have expressed their strong resentment and their immediate intention to transfer to universities in other countries, while others say that the decision has a positive side, "protecting our souls and innocent people."

¶5. ABUSE OF TRAVELERS: Pan-Arab daily, Asharq Al-Awsat reported that just before the issuance of the latest decision by the U.S. Department of State regarding screening of air

travelers to the U.S., a Saudi student on a scholarship program traveling to the U.S. to enter the University of Chicago, via Amsterdam airport, was subjected to 2 days of detention, interrogation, several personal inspections, checks of his personal documents and personal belongings, before he was sent back to the Kingdom.

**¶6. COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT:** Arab News wrote under the op-ed titled "Collective Punishment is No Answer" - "It has not been a great start to 2010. The failed terrorist attempt by a Nigerian passenger to blow up an American airliner has brought the war against terror back to the forefront. President Barack Obama has pointed the finger to Al-Qaeda in Yemen and has ordered a series of measures to be taken to tighten security at American airports and restrict granting visas to nationals from countries who the U.S. associates, directly or indirectly, with terrorists. Most of the countries on the new list are Arab and Muslim ... Muslims are once again being stigmatized and penalized because they are being associated with terror and terrorism. If the Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab was a blue-eyed renegade belonging to a fringe Bible-belt sect, Western reaction would have been different ... to punish an entire nation for the folly of one citizen will only serve the goals of the terrorists, and right-wing forces that are gaining ground in the West ... Obama's first global message was to Muslims everywhere, which he delivered from Cairo University. He promised openness, tolerance, he vowed to open a new page in America's relations with the Muslim world. Today Obama's acts are a breach of those promises. Yes, Al-Qaeda is still there, a menace not only to the West but to the Muslim world and our children. But is this the way to combat it?"

**¶7. US FAILURE:** Saudi Gazette editorialized in the lead editorial entitled "Air Security" that "The U.S. has now

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placed the nationals of 15 countries on a list of passengers that must receive extra screening when traveling to the U.S. The new procedures are clearly discriminatory, bordering on ethnic profiling. The vast majority of nationals (on the list), including Saudi Arabia, harbor no ill will towards the U.S. and have no intention of causing any harm whatsoever. Increased security for air travel is difficult to argue against. So why not allow all of us equal standing in the fight against terrorism and submit all of us to the same procedures? The U.S.'s own intelligence system failed miserably ... for a country that prides itself on equality, the U.S. should practice the same ethos in its relationship to the rest of the world."

**¶8. DEMAND FOR RECIPROCITY:** A Saudi blogger, Al-Tomaar, commented on the new security measures at American ports against citizens of certain countries, including Saudis, and called for treating American citizens coming into Saudi Arabia in the same manner.

SMITH